

impact journalism day



Saturday Monitor

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Together, we can. We all know that 'bad news' must be reported; but readers are also hungry for other stories, stories featuring bright ideas that get them thinking and that spark change. Indeed, featuring key issues has a first impact by raising awareness but highlighting solutions to these problems has a double impact because it sparks action.



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THE MALAYSIAN STAR Tribune de Genève

45 newspapers unite to bring readers uplifting, solutions-based news



Christian de Boisredon Editorial

Reading the news on a daily basis can be a depressing affair. Worldwide, readers and audiences repeatedly report that they are put off by how negative the news seems to be.

Yet the media's role is to bring major issues and problems to the foreground and to keep us alert. Must the headlines conform to the age-old adage that "when it bleeds, it leads"?

The idea behind Impact Journalism Day is to show that the media also fulfill their role by reporting on inspiring solutions to the world's problems.

The alliance of 45 newspapers,

united by Sparknews, presents a different vision of journalism: problems AND solutions can make the news together. This view, along with the conviction that quality, solutions-based news is something readers aspire to have more of, is part of a growing movement in the press to feature stories of hope and change.

Impact Journalism Day is just the beginning. Each edition has seen a steady increase in the number of newspapers and newsrooms on-board, excited to show their commitment to solutions-based reporting. Some journalists were initially concerned this content might be na-

ïve or simplistic, but are now eager to participate and uphold this philosophy in their day-to-day activities. They are fueled by conviction and also by seeing firsthand that this type of reporting has a measurable impact on the ground.

When the public learns of real solutions, the results can be tremendous. Readers gain greater understanding of the problems and are given the means to engage and the hope to believe that they can become changemakers.

Every reader can and does make a difference. Last year's articles helped contribute to the growth of the projects featured, via an increase

in awareness, volunteering, orders, investments, donations or even via replication in new countries.

Now it's your turn to be part of the movement!

Show the media that this kind of news matters. Tell your friends and family about

Impact Journalism Day, buy an extra copy for your children or your colleagues, share the articles you like on the web and be part of the conversation on Twitter and Facebook.

You can take part in our selfie contest by posting a photo of yourself and this newspaper via Twitter (#ImpactJournalism and add the @ of your newspaper) or the Facebook

page of our founding partner, AXA (facebook.com/AXAPeopleProtectors).

Help the innovators and entrepreneurs featured in these stories to overcome the challenges they face by joining a brainstorming session (beta.makesense.org/ijd).

And suggest projects we might consider for next year's Impact Journalism Day

(www.sparknews.com/ijd).

Enjoy your read!

Christian is the founder of Sparknews and an Ashoka Fellow.
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UGANDA: Sack gardening



BANGLADESH: Floating hospital



PARAGUAY: Recycled musical instruments



GHANA: Merry-go-round generates electricity

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Maximum use. On small an 30ft by 50ft plot of land, Harriet Nakabaale grows food enough for her family's consumption and some for sale, year in year out.

BY MATHIAS WANDERA

KAMPALA, UGANDA. Harriet Nakabaale, 45, a resident of Kawaala, a Kampala suburb, lives in a small one-bedroom house set on a plot of land measuring 30ft by 50ft. This is typical for many peri-urban poor households who cannot afford the luxury of spacious lawns and tree-lined driveways.

Despite the small size, Ms Nakabaale has turned her small compound into a neat green garden that has become the envy of many and has now become a demonstration garden of sorts.

Early nurturing

Nakabaale apparently learnt sack-farming from her parents who used to practice it at home on a small scale. In fact, growing up, she was always told every woman needs a garden, something that inspired her to set up a sack-garden to fit in her small space.

When you walk through the small gate into her homestead, it is the green that welcomes you. Sacks sit side by side along a small corridor that leads to her door. There are also cut one-litre plastic soda bottles hanging at the verandah of the chicken coop and black disused paint cans stand in between the sacks. All are teaming with crops. The sacks are not ordinary, at least in regards to size. They are so gigantic with a radius of just over one metre. She has only four of them; exactly what her compound can hold.

Setting up the garden

"I started by collecting huge sacks that had been dumped around my neighbourhood. Given that I have always had a poultry house, I was able to compost chicken manure that had accumulated in the coop. This I mixed with black soil to enrich it. But I did not just fill the sacks with soil, I had to place small pebble stones at the middle of the sack, right from bottom to top, then fill the sack with

Sack-farming: A new income source for urban households



Harriet Nakabaale poses for a photo in her sack garden. Below, she has plants flourishing even in egg shells. COURTESY PHOTOS.

her philosophy, size does not matter, which is why even in egg shells there are thriving plants.

In order to ensure maximum usage of the sack, she grows some crops on the sides of the bag. "Usually, the crops with big roots such as carrots go on the top and the sides are reserved for those with small roots such as ordinary vegetables. I water my sack-garden almost on a daily basis so I have no such a thing as a crop-growing season. My garden is ever green, even during the dry season," she says.

Nakabaale's approach to farming perhaps points to the direction that many poor urban households with limited land should take. It does not only ensure that there is something for the family to eat but also brings in a little money to meet other household needs.

Reaping big

"This business has been very instrumental in my life. With sack-farming, I have kept my three children in school. We do not buy foodstuffs from the market because, much as I sell most of the food crops I produce, there is always enough left for home consumption," Nakabaale shares.

As we interact, some of her customers from the neighbourhood keep streaming in to buy. On several occasions, we are forced to put our interaction on hold to allow her attend to her customers.

She has been doing sack-farming for 21 years and is proud to be making a decent living from a venture she did not even invest much money in. "The sacks I always use are those that have been dumped as waste. And the black soil and gravel stones are also readily available around the neighbourhood," she says.

SOLUTION FOR SMALL LAND



Nakabaale tends to her sack garden.

THE NUMBERS

Shs20,000

Amount (about \$6.6) Nakabaale charges to train others in sack-farming. She is a model sack gardener in the area.

Shs1 million

Amount (about \$330) she earns as a sack-farming teacher and also from the sale of seedlings and crops, mostly vegetables.

soil, leaving the stones erect in the middle," the mother of three says.

The stones ensure sufficient water distribution throughout the sacks during watering. In one of the sacks

she grows spinach, dodo and carrots. In another sack is a young guava tree, surrounded by green vegetables. In yet another there are spring onions, celery, tomatoes and spinach. True to

With Uganda's unemployment rate and poverty levels climbing, the urban folk with limited access to land, will find sack-farming very helpful as it is a venture that minimises household expenditure, while maximising income.

According to Richard Mugisha, an agricultural consultant at AgriProFocus Uganda, a variety of crops can be grown in sacks. Guiding us around BKB organic Demonstration Farm in Garuga, Entebbe, Mugisha shows us vari-

ous sacks-holding simple vegetables, onions, tomatoes, and even relatively big crops such as maize. "We need people, especially in the urban areas to engage in agriculture, regardless of limited land. And the answer is sack farming. It is simple to carry out and not economically straining to start. Sack gardening does not call for big space. Furthermore, one gets to harvest all year long as sack-farming waits for no rain but only calls for a bit of watering," Mugisha sums it all up.

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Children play on a merry-go-round machine. As they push and spin it around, it powers a turbine, which produces energy. PHOTOS BY EMPOWER PLAYGROUNDS INC./CRYS KEVAN LEE

Lighting up remote villages through play

Energy. As the little souls push the play machine, all they care about is the fun, only a few understand that they are actually helping to generate electricity.

BY SABINE HERVY ET OLIVIER GASSELIN

PARIS, FRANCE. In Pedia-torkope, a tiny impoverished island in south-east Ghana, Africa, the locals do not have electricity. The island is not linked to the national energy grid. To bring them electric light, Empower Playgrounds had the idea of installing a special merry-go-round in the playground of a local primary school. When the children push and spin it around, it powers a turbine, which produces energy. The merry-go-round also recharges batteries, which can power energy-saving LED lamps for more than 40 hours.

The children are responsible for recharging the batteries during their playtime. In the evening, they take these lamps home. The idea is life-changing, because until now, it was difficult to have light when night fell. Thanks to these lamps, which are less dangerous than the oil-lamps, which many villagers use, they can continue their studies and do their homework at home. As a result, students are getting better results at school because of this ingenious invention.

Improved performance

"Before, we could not give the children work to do at home because it was dark when they got back after school. As a result, they had poor results at school, whereas now, thanks to these lamps, they are making progress," a teacher told the media. This has the further advantage of students being able to continue their education after primary school.

The merry-go-round project is already in place in 42 schools

out of the 40,000 across the country. This African nation is often affected by electricity shortages, which interrupt the everyday lives of its inhabitants, particularly those who live out in the countryside. The humanitarian organisation is also launching another project, setting up a small factory producing solar energy, which Africa has no shortage of. Locals can buy a battery, which will power several lamps, as well as charge their mobile phones. The battery lasts a month and costs approximately €1.30 (about Shs4,000) to recharge. This money pays for maintenance at the solar energy plant.

This invention looks set to have a bright future. It is estimated that throughout the world, around 600 million people do not have the means of lighting their homes, with Africa as the continent worst affected.

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ABOUT EMPOWER PLAYGROUNDS



Empower Playgrounds, Inc (EPI) is a U.S.-based public charity that has developed electricity-generating playground equipment for use in rural third-world communities with drastically low rural electrification rates. The mission of EPI is to use this play equipment, along with hands-on science kits, to enhance educational opportunities for children.

How it works

The EPI system currently includes a power generating merry-go-round, with glider swing and other equipment currently being field-tested. The platform merry-go-round allows many children to ride, while a few take turns pushing. The generation train starts with a hub-bearing to which the entire deck of the merry-go-round is attached. A drive shaft

from the hub connects to a helical gearbox operating as a speed-increaser. The high-speed output shaft then turns a permanent rare earth magnet windmill generator. The efficiency of this generator is over 70 per cent.

The electricity generated by the merry-go-round and all other play equipment in the EPI system is carried by underground wires to a power enclosure, where it is converted to direct current and used to charge a large AGM deep cycle battery. In the enclosure, a state-of-the-art MPPT (maximum power point tracking) power controller effectively manages the charging and discharging of the storage batteries, protecting against drainage and ensuring long battery life. A 30-watt solar panel is also connected to the power enclosure for educational purposes and to prevent battery discharging during school breaks.

Source: www.wikipedia.org

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Sparknews is a social enterprise whose mission is to source and share positive initiatives via leading media, and to inspire businesses to innovate and contribute to building a better world. We would like to thank our partner newspapers, AXA, Total, ADP and Ashoka. Contact us: impact@sparknews.com

At the initiative of Sparknews, leading international media are joining forces to promote solutions journalism. **Help them spark change!**



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Best selfie makers will get the chance to meet-up with some prestigious editors-in-chief.

AXA redefining standards

AXA, a founding partner of IJD in line with the Group's activities in leading initiatives in the field of protection, AXA chose to support Impact Journalism Day 2015 in promoting positive solutions across the globe.

Better protection starts with a deeper understanding of the risks to which we are exposed. That's why AXA supports university research throughout the world, via the AXA Research Fund, a unique initiative centred around scientific patronage. We also need to better understand existing solutions designed to protect us. AXA People Protectors' Facebook page brings together 1.5 million fans in 49 countries to share projects and ideas about better protecting our loved ones and our environment. Articles featured during Impact Journalism Day will be showcased at [facebook.com/axapeopleprotectors](https://www.facebook.com/axapeopleprotectors) — @axa

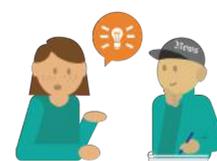
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In brainstorming workshops organised by Make Sense, designed to help projects overcome challenges.

sparknews.com/ijd/makesense



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Your project or a project you know that deserves to be featured in **45 leading international newspapers** at sparknews.com/ijd/submissions

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Paris Airports, Impact Journalism Day partner, for offering IJD exceptional visibility at its terminals, in particular Terminal 2E at Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport - ranked by the latest Skytracks study as the 6th best airport terminal in the world. — @aerportsParis

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A woman attends to a patient in one of the Friendship hospitals in Bangladesh. Right: People stand outside one of the floating hospitals. PHOTOS BY SK ENAMUL HAQUE/INTERNET

A floating hospital for the poor



"I saw a baby who had suffered burns crying for three days because they did not even have access to antipyretics like Paracetamol to ease his pain. I felt angry at the injustice of it all. I felt responsible to do something. They have the same rights as the rest of us," RUNA KHAN, FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FRIENDSHIP

Floating hospitals. In 2002, Runa Khan, founder and executive director of Friendship, a value-based organisation in Bangladesh, converted a French river barge into the first ship hospital of Bangladesh—an idea too radical even for NGOs to fund at the time. This has enabled the most impoverished in the country access healthcare.

BY AMITAVA KAR,

DHAKA, BANGLADESH. The way basic healthcare is provided to some of the most impoverished people in Bangladesh changed forever in the year 2002. That is when Runa Khan converted a river barge, sailed by Yves Marre from France to Bangladesh in 1994, into the first floating hospital of the country.

No one had helped these people before—they were too poor even for the NGOs. But not for Runa Khan: "I saw a mother feeding her baby in the dark. I saw a baby who had suffered burns crying for three days because they did not even have access to antipyretics like Paracetamol to ease his pain. I felt angry at the injustice of it all. I felt responsible to do something. They have the same rights as the rest of us."

But soon she was faced with more questions than answers. Where was she to start from? These people had nothing and needed everything. What good was it to talk about rights when

someone was so hungry that he could not even stand up? So she created jobs for them, built schools, ensured supply of clean water, took care of them after disasters, and gave them the most precious thing of all—dignity and hope.

Perhaps that is the difference between her and other development workers. "We work directly with the people and the donors. We do not do project to project work but work holistically with communities, ensuring they are better off than when we started," Khan opines.

Today, her organisation, Friendship, works in the most remote and inaccessible char-islands and riverbanks of northern Bangladesh and the remote Coastal belt in the South. Armed with a fleet of three fully operational hospital ships, even performing orthopaedic and reconstructive surgeries on board, Friendship has more than 25 boats and river ambulances and has developed a threeter health care system from community based operators to sec-

ondary level interventions, with 556 Friendship Community medicsaides, 550 satellite clinics, run by a team of 22 inhouse doctors and more than 200 international volunteer medical specialists. Under the mHealth project, Friendship is also developing the first mobile-based primary health care delivery services to provide medical services at pointofcare.

Challenges

Some of the challenges she faced in the beginning still remain. Khan deliberates: "No one believed I could do this. Funding was always a challenge. Yet the most painful challenge I face daily is when I have to make a decision on who to help and who to leave behind. Do I help a young boy in need of an expensive heart surgery or do I give hundreds of people their vision back or cure women of cervical cancer?"

While the question may open a floodgate of issues in the world of ethics, Khan is not interested in all that logic chopping. "If you have empathy and compassion in your heart, you

will find a way."

The world seems to have taken notice of her sacrifice. In 2012, she received the Social Entrepreneur Award from Schwab Foundation; Women Entrepreneur Excellence Award by SCWEC 2010; IDB Award, 2008; Rolex Award, 2006; Ashoka Fellowship in 1994.

When she is not busy saving lives, Khan is an author—she has written six books on pedagogy and two children's fairy tales. She chairs Global Dignity in Bangladesh, founded by the Crown Prince of Norway. She is also the Founder of Friendship International, operating in five countries.

Many have accused her of "spoiling the market" by providing many basic needs for free, to which Khan says: "If neither the government nor any NGO is going to help them, we will." How to provide affordable healthcare to the poor? "The question you need to ask is how to deliver efficient healthcare services to those who so desperately need it," Khan asserts.

Fight still on

"Healthcare and education is their universal right and it is pointless to argue if they can afford it or not. I am going to fight with all my might so that those who cannot afford it still have access to these fundamental rights."

Khan is the kind of person who, to save someone, jumps into the fire, not run away from it.

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Atuheire (right) with one of his workers at his homebased factory

Innovation. Bananas are a renowned staple food in the central and western parts of Uganda, an unlikely but invaluable raw material for paper.

BY MATHIAS WANDERA

KAMPALA, UGANDA. You don't have to walk a very long distance anywhere in Uganda to see them; sticking out of the ground or lying on the surface. Black, green or stained clear, they could easily make for part of the environs. Except for one thing, they are polythene bags, a top enemy of the environment.

This non-biodegradable waste takes up to 400 years to decompose and thus chokes the soils, blocks the smooth water filtration and percolation into the soil, putting soil fertility in jeopardy. And that is not all. The polythene bags, or *kaveera* as they are commonly known, also clog water channels and have often led to flooding or created breeding ditches for mosquitoes.

With over 39,600 tons of polythene waste released into the environment each year, the sight of polythene is something Ugandans have come to contend with. Not everyone though, at least not a then 23-year-old university student of Wood Science and Technology at Makerere University. What if a more environmentally-friendly packaging material could be tailored to replace polythene bags?

This is a possibility Godfrey Atuheire pondered for a while, until he found the opportunity to bring his brilliant thought to life, and he seized it! The year was 2006 and he

Saving the environment with banana paper

was doing research for his prospective school project at the Uganda Industrial Research Institute (UIRI). Banana paper would be his solution, he realised. He would make his paper in the most environmentally friendly way, using banana fibre given that the banana plant is abundant in Uganda.

An internship at the institute after graduation fed his hunger for knowledge on making paper bags. It is then that he started making the paper bags out of banana stems at his home in Kinawataka, a Kampala suburb before relocating to his current operating premises in Kireka.

"I usually collect the banana stems free of charge from market places where they are readily available and

always disposed of as waste. It is always better to use stems that are free of disease," says Atuheire, now aged 33. He chose to use banana stems to make the paper bags because the stems have the desired fibre length, high lignin and cellulose content compared to other alternatives like sisal, water hyacinth and papyrus. These are what counts in making a strong yet easy to fold paper.

From banana to paper

Fibre is extracted from the banana stems by removing the soft part, as the inner fiber is what is used for making paper. Atuheire uses a machine called the extractor for this purpose. He acquired it at Shs3m (US\$1,000) from

tion and in case the desired paper is to be coloured, the intended colour is added at this stage.

"We then scoop the porridge like pulp using a casting net and put it under the sun to dry. The dried material is the paper. Usually it is rough, so we pass it through a smoothening machine to give it a smooth surface. We can then model and design the bags," Atuheire explains.

Perfect shopping bag

The resultant bags have hard material that cannot easily be ripped apart, thus they are a solid packaging material. And they are colourful too. They can be customised with particular slogans and designs for the respective clients, something that has gotten a number of users intrigued.

Shamim Ndikwani, 25, and a resident of Namasuba, a Kampala suburb, commends the introduction of paper bags, partly for their environmental friendliness but mostly for the colour they have brought to her shopping experience. "From what I have heard the bags are good for the environment. But what I like most about them is that they are presentable given the colour and designs I have seen around. Also, compared with the ones we receive from supermarkets, I have realised the bags are stronger than *kavera* and definitely easier to carry. How I wish they were cheaper," Ndikwani shares her experience with paper bags.

But there is more to paper bags than just their appealing look, as Atuheire notes; "Paper bags are everything polythene bags aren't. They are completely organic and hence rot very easily after disposal, making them very environmentally friendly." Frank Muramuzi, executive director of the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE), says the making of paper bags addresses the long nursed woes of Uganda's environment.

Money and jobs

Until recently, Atuheire had six employees and used to produce between 150 and 200 paper bags daily. However, following a ban by Uganda's National Environmental Management Association on the use of polythene bags of 30 microns and below on April 15, 2015, Atuheire's production has shot through the roof in a bid to catch up with the overwhelming demand for paper bags.

"Today I employ 28 people and on a daily basis I produce over 3,800 paper bags, selling them for a price ranging between Shs 200 (20 US cents) and Shs 3,000 (US\$1) depending on size and design.

Atuheire plans to double this production in the foreseeable future. Initially, even with minimal levels of production, he used to sell almost half of the total produce to neighbouring Rwanda where there is a total ban on polythene bag usage. The situation has, however, changed as there is nothing left for export. He believes that this industry could be an answer to youth unemployment and is playing his part by training youth groups on the craft.



THE NUMBERS

400

The number years it takes polythene to decompose

39,600

Tons of polythene waste released into the environment each year in Uganda

3,800

Paper bags the company produces in a day

UIRI. The extracted fiber is thereafter washed, cut into small pieces and cooked for three hours in pots and later cooled. It is this cooked material that is mixed with water and put into the pulping machine that beats and crushes the solution into pulp, a porridge like mixture. Starch is usually added to create a paper product that will not be prone to water penetra-

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Five faiths sharing one roof

Multi cultural. It is possible for very different rituals and beliefs about life and the afterlife to coexist: this little great miracle happens every day at the House of Religions, in the multicultural outskirts of Bern.

BY SIMONETTA CARATTI

BERN, SWITZERLAND. While the fear of jihadist terrorism is rife in Europe, a seed of hope blooms within the heart of neutral Switzerland: a place of dialogue. Five places of worship live together under the same roof: a mosque, a Hindu temple, an Alevi 'dergâh', a Buddhist centre and a church (used by eight different communities, including the local Ethiopian and Moravian communities).

A new two-storey glass and concrete complex hosts the five places of worship (funded and organised by the communities). The design also features a shared common area for all the communities, with conference rooms, a library and a restaurant.

Behind this miracle, three men of different religions stand out: a Moravian priest, an imam and a rabbi. More than 10 years ago, when the world was shaken by 9/11 and the media focus turned to cultural differences, these men shared a dream: peaceful coexistence among religions.

That seed has now bloomed. The road has not been easy. The discouraging reaction of a public administrator in Bern, as he listened to the idea for the project for the first time, is

just one telling example: "This project is unnecessary and destined to fail," he commented.

The power of information

It took time, a lot of good will and determination, but the results finally came. Overcoming the fear of those who are different by getting to know them, but also transforming prejudice into tolerance through dialogue: these are the pillars upon which Bern's House of Religions was built.

It has been a long, 10 year journey. "We will not save the world, we are not Missionaries, but we practice dialogue: not the abstract one among religions, but the concrete one among people of different faiths who built their temples under the same roof and share common spaces. There has been no shortage of problems, we've had conflicts, but we found solutions," explains Gerda Hauck, president of the association of 'House of Religions Dialogue among Cultures'.

Different approaches to rituals could heat up the situation: a festive day of prayer for one religion could be considered impure by another. "We prevent one community from prestricking the activity of others. There have been frictions, but we



Above, part of the Mosque, and Muslims worshipping.

have come up with a rule: we must

THE HISTORY

In the 2000s, plans were started to establish a cultural institution of Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu faith traditions, and on April 25, 2002, the association "Haus der Religionen - Dialog der Kulturen" (meaning House of religions, dialogue of cultures) was established. In March 2006, the "Stiftung Europaplatz" foundation was founded, which raised the necessary funds for the project, including sacred spaces, among others for Hindu and Buddhist communities, of the Alevites and the Council of Christian Churches in the canton of Bern (AKB). In the beginning, the Jewish community of Bern and the Bahá'í Faith community did not wish to set up own rooms, but ideally supported the project. The cantonal Islamic Umma association has withdrawn from the project after initial concessions, but the Muslim association, Hochfeldstrasse, however, was interested to participate.

discuss and find solutions in a limited time. And this has always worked," Hauck explains.

The Hindu minister confirms: "Our prayers are festive, explosive, musical, noisy. Nothing to do with Muslim rituals. We have had disagreements but we have learned that we have to discuss and find a solution." Sasikumar Tharmalingam, 38 years old, holds celebrations six times a day and follows 450 Hindu families, particularly Tamil, devoted to Shiva. This divinity stands out in the colourful temple, which counts 350 plaster statues sculpted by artists who came from Tamil Nadu.

A dialogue not a mixture

"The idea of living side by side, on the same doorstep with Muslims or Christians, was a strange one at the beginning, but this formula works. There are points of contact among religions and all of them, after all, say the same thing: God is love," the Hindu minister says.

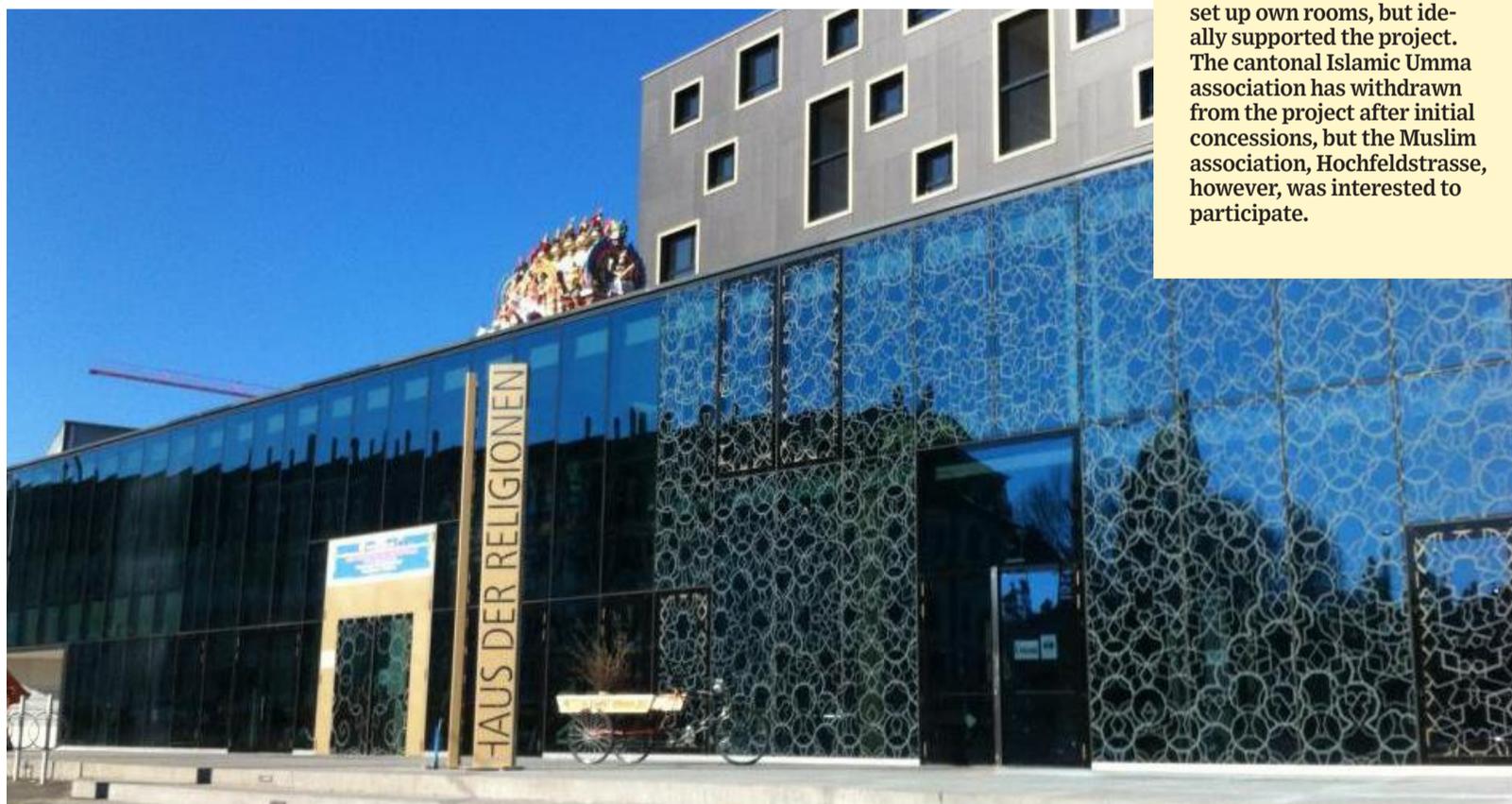
The joyful explosion of colours in his temple clashes with the sober Alevi 'dergâh' upstairs: a cream-coloured room with no images, a table, a cauldron and 12 niches in the wall representing as many philosophers.

The mosque is elegant, built on two floors: downstairs for men, upstairs for women. The walls are decorated with geometric designs on a black and purple background featuring the names of the 28 prophets; a huge crystal chandelier (brought disassembled from Turkey) dominates the centre.

"We are a model of interreligious coexistence. The mistrust towards Muslims exists in particular among those who do not know us. That is why it is important to promote knowledge of different faiths. Next generations will reap the benefits," explains Mustafa Memeti.

The Albanian imam has his own vision: "We promote dialogue, but not mixture. Each of us maintains our own religious identity in their respective place of worship," he underlines. His mosque borders with the Buddhist centre: a large room where orange yoga mats stand out, together with the gold of a quiet golden Buddha.

It comes from Thailand and is the only religious symbol in the room. "We receive visits from people who do not have a faith but seek a way to live better. We teach methods, such as meditation, that are useful against stress; we don't lead anybody to believe in anything," explains Marco Genteki Röss, vice president of the Buddhist Intercultural Association in Bern. "The House of Religions is an important social lab for promoting dialogue and knowledge of different religions. We have different faiths and rituals, every one of us has their own space and specificity, but we can meet and know one another in the common areas," he concludes.



The House of Religions that hosts five places of worship, here the different communities strive in dialogue and harmony.

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From trash to the theatre

Helping hand. In the Cateura area of Paraguay, more than 40 per cent of children do not finish school and end up hanging around the neighbourhood's landfill site. Favio Chávez decided to help them by giving them music lessons with instruments made out of local recycled trash.

Members of Orquesta de Instrumentos Reciclados de Cateura—the Recycled Instruments Orchestra of Cateura) performing on one of their international tours.



BY INES RAMDANE

CATEURA, PARAGUAY: While many of the children in Asuncion's Cateura slum pin their hopes for the future on landing careers as football players or pop stars, Brandon Cobone's ticket out of the shanty-town was something stranger than a soccer ball and rarer than a microphone. It was a Frankenstein of a double bass, cobbled together from garbage plucked from the nearby landfill that gives Cateura both its name and smell.

The 18-year-old is a member of the Orquesta de Instrumentos Reciclados de Cateura (the Recycled Instruments Orchestra of Cateura) which uses music to give the children of the slum the skills to build a better future.

The orchestra was created almost by accident by environmental engineer Favio Chávez, a music lover who was working with the gancheros, or garbage pickers who comb the vast landfill for recyclables. "It started with a simple comment," he said, referring to the gancheros' request, after learning of Chávez's musical skills, that he give their children lessons. Chávez soon ran into a stumbling block. He didn't own enough instruments to go around, especially since his students' zeal sometimes resulted in inadvertently smashed guitars or cracked violins.

A concoction of instruments

And so Chávez resolved to take advantage of one resource he had in abundance - trash. He made a violin out of a strainer, a metal dish and metal tubing. "It didn't sound like much," he acknowledged, adding that the next few instruments, including

a "guitar" cut out of a piece of wood with a couple of strings attached, weren't much better. "They were didactic."

Chávez teamed up with one of the gancheros, a skilled carpenter named Nicolás Gómez, to make a variety of instruments that looked more or less like the real thing and

sounded like it, too. Now the Orquesta has versions of most of the instruments in a conventional orchestra, concocted out of cooking pots, bottle tops, melted keys and the like.

The Orquesta became an international phenomenon after a group of filmmakers took interest and posted a teaser for a documentary on the Internet in 2012 (titled "Landfill Harmonic," it premiered at Austin's South by Southwest festival

this year). Since then it's been flooded with invitations to play stages from Germany to Japan and even toured South America as an opening act for Metallica.

Sandwiched between the landfill and the Paraguay River, the Cateura slum is a collection of low-slung homes, some made from raw brick and others pasted together from corrugated tin and recuperated trash. Sewage runs in muddy streets pocked with giant puddles of standing water and strewn with detritus fallen from the constant comings-and-goings of fetid garbage trucks. The air is sour with the stench of the landfill, where many of the slum's 20,000 plus residents eek out a living as gancheros. And when the river floods, as it did last year, Cateura is submerged.

Chávez notes that the Orquesta is less about forging worldclass musicians than turning disenfran-

chised children into fully fledged citizens. "Are they all going to be professional musicians? I don't think so," he said. "What we want is to teach a different way of being, to instill in them different values than those that hold sway in their community."

"There, the role models are the gang leaders, who impose themselves through violence and dominance," he said. "In the Orquesta, the role models are the hardest workers, those with the most dedication, the most commitment."

The 40 plus orchestra members are selected not for their innate musicality but for the assiduousness with which they attend Saturday morning lessons. Once chosen, they must also attend weekly rehearsals, where they prepare a repertory that includes classical standbys—Beethoven's "5th Symphony" and Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons"—as well as traditional Paraguayan tunes.

Thanks to donations, the musicians now have conventional instruments they use in rehearsals. But they continue to play on the homemade instruments, an integral part of the Orquesta's identity, for performances.

CHALLENGING VENTURE

"Poor people need to eat today," Favio Chávez says. "They don't think about tomorrow's problems. But learning music means you have to plan. It's very challenging to explain to a child who lives in adverse conditions that if his dream is to play the piano he needs to sit on a stool for five hours a day."

Many parents also struggle to see the advantages of such an attitude. "Most tell their kids that a violin can't feed you; that they need to work to eat," says Jorge Ríos, 35, a recycler whose two daughters play in the orchestra. "But thanks to that violin my kids have seen new countries. They have an opportunity for a better future."

"In Cateura, nothing is formal, nothing is planned and everything happens almost spontaneously," said the Frenchborn assistant director, Thomas Lecourt, adding that their first international tours were logistical nightmares because many of the children did not have passports or even birth certificates. "The rehearsals, the trips, the responsibility of being in the Orquesta brings structure to their lives."

Inside a narrow lot in the middle of the slum, workers are busy building the Orquesta's first permanent space. Already a small cadre of teenage girls scratch out basic notes on their violas, apparently deaf to the cacophony of hammering, sawing and drilling all around. Boys making snare drums out of wood and metal scraps, with old Xrays as skins, add to the tumult.

"Joining the Orquesta put me on a different track in life," said Andrés Riveros, 20, a saxophonist in his first year of college. "And lucky for that, because a lot of my friends who did not join are either drug addicts or in prison by now."

Cobone, who has visited some 15 countries with the Orquesta, is also preparing to go to college. He has already packed more experience into his 18 years than he expected to in a lifetime.

"From the time I was little I always wanted to travel, but I never imagined it would happen...and especially not because of this," he said, gesturing to his double bass, a dented steel drum that once contained calcium carbide and castaway wooden beams.

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A woman in the driver's seat

Empowered. By training and hiring only female chauffeurs, a taxi service in Mumbai provides women with skills, jobs and independence, while offering female passengers a sense of security.

BY RAKSHA KUMAR

MUMBAI, INDIA: The traffic light turns green and Rupa Swali pulls out onto the Western Express Highway in Mumbai, careful to avoid the swarm of motorbikes and autorickshaws zipping past. Suddenly an unruly bus runs the light in the other direction and careens straight towards her, laying on its horn.

Swali is used to this and slams her brakes just in time, then glances at the passenger in the back seat to check for a reaction. Fortunately, the woman seems absorbed on her iPhone and unaware of the danger just averted.

Navigating the jungle of Mumbai's traffic has become second nature for Swali, who drives a taxi for a living. But until about four years ago, she had never sat in a car, let alone driven one. That was when she decided to leave her physically-abusive husband of 19 years. Even though she was born and brought up in Mumbai, India's commercial capital, she was unskilled and unsure of how to earn a living. She felt lonely, scared and helpless. To top it, she had a teenage daughter to care for.

"I wanted a job that would provide me with dignity and financial security," she said. At around the same time, a management professional named Preeti Sharma Menon



Some of the female cab drivers at a van.

was looking to set up an organisation that would help women become self-reliant. Of the nearly six million women living in this city, about half are daily wage earners living on the streets or in tiny shanties.

Menon created Viira Cabs ("Viira" means courageous woman) in June 2011 to provide sustained, dignified employment to under-privileged women. She had launched the Viira Motor Training Programme six months earlier; Swali was one of the first batch of 200 female drivers, who were taught to drive.

After a rigorous six month training programme (free of charge), 80 earned their licenses. Several have driven for Viira Cabs since. (The training programme has since been reduced to 12 weeks.) Today, Viira Cabs has a fleet of 16 eco-friendly cabs and about 20 female drivers who earn an average 15,000 rupees (\$240 or about Shs704,000) a month, working day and night shifts.

Even though there are a few other women drivers only taxi services in the country, Viira is the only one that provides comprehensive training, including grooming, etiquette and self-defense. Every driver is equipped with pepper spray and a GPS system with panic alerts.

The service provides more than just skills and jobs. In a country where violence against women is prevalent, it provides a source of comfort for female passengers. According to the government, a woman is raped every 20 minutes in India. And these are just the reported figures.

India catapulted to infamy in December 2012 after the brutal gang rape of a student in a moving bus in Delhi. She later died of injuries. Two years later, a 27-year-old executive was allegedly raped by an Uber driver in New Delhi; the trial is ongoing. "Given the background of women's safety in the country, I think a woman-drivers-only-cab service brought

relief to many women who commute alone, especially at night," said Menon. Her instincts were right. Viira has hundreds of loyal customers, such as Revati Sharma, 32, who lives in a suburb of Mumbai. "My parents are increasingly paranoid about me travelling alone to work," she said. "But I work in an advertising agency where there are no set hours.

When I returned at 3am in the morning, I used to see my mother waiting anxiously for me at the door. Frankly, I am also much more relaxed when a woman is driving. I can doze off." Senior citizens and differently abled people and also a large percentage of Viira's customers. They claim that female drivers are more thoughtful, helping them in and out of the cars. Once the least-respected members of their families and communities, these women have now become among the most important. Their income is helping to fund their children's education; Swali's daughter

is now a veterinary doctor. The drivers keep the cars with them, and when Swali drives her taxi into the semislum where she lives, her neighbours treat her like a celebrity. But Menon said there are challenges as well, such as the cost of training and the high rate of attrition. "The women we employ come from low-income backgrounds. Most of them are the primary caregivers in their families, so whenever there is an illness or death in the family, they are the first to quit their jobs." While looking for other investors, Menon is keeping the operation afloat with her own money. She might have to shut it down despite the evidence that it is sorely needed. Already, she feels bad that she has to turn customers away. "There is more demand than we can meet," she said.

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Saving Food, Saving Lives

BY EVI SALTOU
& SHRADHA IYER

TA NEA, ATHENS, GREECE: "Not a single portion of food wasted!" With this motto, a group of young people has succeeded in making Greeks aware that throwing away food is not just detrimental to the environment and the economy. It is also something that flies in the face of common sense when there are so many people in need of food in Greek society. With pressure increasing due to Greece's

deepening economic crisis, in 2014 "Boroume" [which means "We can!" in Greek] organized the distribution of a total of 1.3 million meals, a fourfold increase from 2013.

"When we started our initiative, we did not expect such a huge response. Imagine that we began by saving just 12 cheese pies per day," says Alexandros Theodoridis who, together with Xenia Papastavrou and Alexia Moatsou, set up "Boroume" in 2011.

Today, a group of 30 trained volunteers working from Boroume's main office in Athens coordinates the dis-

tribution of over 4,000 meals per day to a variety of welfare institutions and food aid programs all over the country. "Boroume" has struck alliances with both public

and private entities, so that no more food is wasted. It does not pick up, store or deliver food but functions in an innovative way as a communication hub between food donors and recipient organizations.

Last year Boroume launched four new programs aimed at fighting food waste and supporting poor families:

A gleaning project to save fresh

fruit and vegetables that cannot be sold on the market and that would otherwise be left on the fields to rot. The "We Are Family" project to provide nutritional assistance from donations within and outside of Greece directly to people in need. The "Boroume in the Neighborhood" initiative whereby groups of volunteers raise awareness about food waste across neighborhoods. The "Boroume at School" project, a series of educational activities that mainly targets primary school children.

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Blood donors a text away

Blood Donors Network.

This is a web and mobile-based application for hospitals, health centres and the Red Cross, that provides direct access to compatible blood types from its network.

BY IRIS C. GONZALES

MANILA, PHILIPPINES. Joel Barquez still remembers vividly that fateful day of December 12, 1997. Barquez, the founder of Blood Donors Network, was hospitalised for Dengue Fever at St Luke's Medical Centre.

"My platelet count had dropped to critical level and the only thing that

would help me with my condition would be to undergo blood transfusion. Unfortunately, it was also the season of Dengue [Fever]. I realised that the supply of blood was low when the doctor had to tell my relatives to call as many people as they could, who could donate blood," Barquez says.

Eighteen years later, Barquez says nothing much has changed. "Some hospitals ask for replacement donors twice the amount that the patient had used in order to replenish their blood supply," he says.

According to Ernesto Datu, head of the Blood Bank at St Luke's Medical Centre, during the summer break and Christmas seasons, blood supply is at its lowest and cannot keep up with the demand.

"People are more apt to be traveling and partying, enjoying the much needed time off, which means fewer donors. Some medical procedures during December have to be suspended until January when blood would readily be available," Barquez says.

How it started

He says time, as well as money, are of the essence, yet just having to search for blood already means time and money wasted, not to mention the physical and emotional trauma that people can experience. As such, Barquez decided to set up Blood Donors Network, a web and mobile-based application for hospitals, health centres and the Red Cross, that provides direct access to compatible blood types from its network of 100 per cent voluntary non remunerated donors.

The innovative idea is a crowd sourced web and mobile platform for the Red Cross, hospitals, blood donors and recipients. Through these web and mobile applications, blood donation happens in the social sphere by providing these blood do-

A volunteer blood donor donates blood for the project. PHOTO BY BLOOD DONOR CENTER, NATIONAL KIDNEY AND TRANSPLANT INSTITUTE (NKT).

HOW IT WORKS

The app. The app is available on the web and will eventually be in the mobile platform (iOS, Android, and Windows).

Operation. Users can manage blood requests, check the number of donors and their blood type affiliated in their institution, as well as updates donation record of the blood donor.

Access. To access the network, the username and password of the user are predefined when there is already an existing licensing agreement.

When an institution sends a request of B+ blood type, donors with that particular type of blood would receive an SMS.

nors "hero badges."

As such, they would be recognised among the blood donors community, health organisations and agencies nationwide. Barquez says hero badges have already been given to some donors when the app was launched in June 2014.

The web and mobile-based app specifically provides a solution to help communities meet their blood supply needs by increasing the acquisition of new blood donors and more importantly, establishing a comprehensive data of donors.

At present, the Network is currently beta tested in two products, the Blood Institutions and Blood Donor. The Blood Institutions is exclusive for international humanitarian organisation such as Red Cross, as well as hospitals. "Its features are available in the web and eventually in the mobile platform (iOS, Android, and Windows)," Barquez says.

"Users can manage blood requests that could directly send to a maximum of 100 blood donors that are geo and blood type targeted. This saves time and money when searching for the specific blood type needed instead of the usual random process," he said.

The Blood Donor on the other hand is available in web and currently de-

veloping the mobile platform.

Participating hospitals in beta testing include St Luke's Medical Centre in Quezon and Global Bonifacio Cities, while Cardinal Santos has also expressed its intention to participate. The organisation has also partnered with Smart Communications and Chikka, both for SMS messaging.

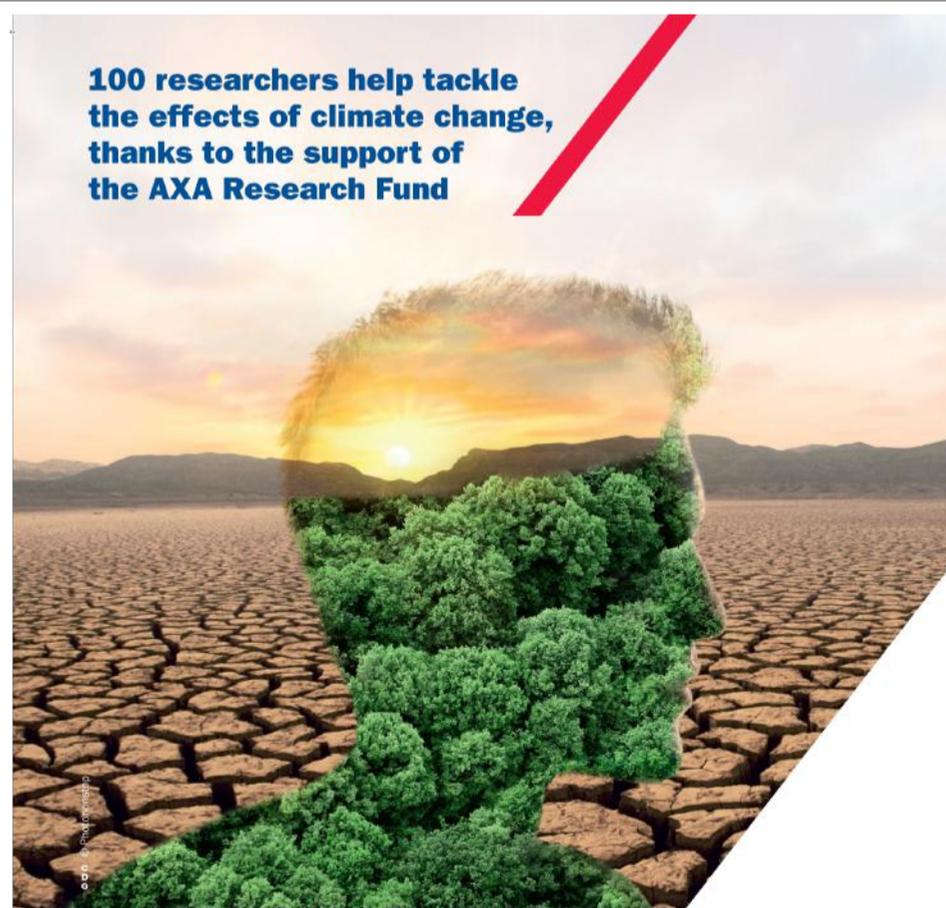
The Asian Development Bank and Microsoft Philippines, support the project. Asked how many patients have benefitted, Barquez says there is no actual data yet but there are "thank you notes" through social media.

Moving forward, Barquez says once the Blood Donors Network is done with its beta tests with selected hospitals, the project would be scaled up by June. "We will propose the app to other hospitals in Metro Manila that have their own blood banks, as well as to university organisations that are very much involved in blood drives," he says.

By 2016, the goal is to go nationwide, Barquez adds. Indeed, the days of searching for much needed blood by families of desperate patients may soon come to an end, thanks to the Blood Donors Network.

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Iris Gamero and Jose Flores in the Institute's radio booth, during the educational programme transmission which is broadcast in Honduras' 18 departments.



Above: Kathia Varela, 18, is one of the 50,000 pupils and students enrolled in the Instituto Hondureño de Educación por Radio (IHER, the Honduran Institute of Education by Radio) Teacher at home programme. PHOTOS BY MARVIN SALGADO

A teacher in your home, education that enlightens Honduras

Education through radio. The Honduran Institute of Education by Radio El Maestro en Casa (Teacher at home) programme combines the use of textbook content, reinforcements by radio and face-to-face tutorials to educate students.

BY EDUARDO DOMÍNGUEZ

TEGUCIGALPA, HONDURAS. More than 50,000 Hondurans, mostly single mothers, are enrolled in elementary and high school through an innovative programme that combines the use of textbooks with classes delivered via the radio.

In Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Kathia Varela gently adjusts the dial of her old stereo to tune into her 5pm radio class on the Catholic radio station La Voz de Suyapa (The Voice of Suyapa), broadcast at 910AM frequency. Next to her is a Spanish textbook on a small table.

Over the airwaves, the modulated sounds of an exchange of voices between a man and a woman, who then pauses and introduces the show: El Instituto Hondureño de Educación por Radio (IHER, the Honduran Institute of Education by Radio) presents its programme El Maestro en Casa (Teacher at home). The lesson begins for this 18-year-old young woman.

This year, Kathia has classmates around 50 000 Hondurans who have, like her, put their hope of professional development in this alternative form of education, given the lack of opportunities to enter the conventional school system.

"The Maestro en Casa" is a programme that combines the use of textbook content, reinforcements by radio and face-to-face tutorials to educate students. It has been implemented by the IHER since 1989. Although it was previously implemented in Costa Rica and Guatemala, Sister Marta Soto, founder and current dean of the programme, admits that it is in Honduras that the best results have arisen.

Since then, more than half a million citizens have left the darkness of illiteracy behind, thanks to this three-dimensional programme, according to IHER's records. "When you give people the opportunity to get an education, there is a change in them and the light of hope appears, be-

cause only an educated nation is a free nation," Sister Marta says.

"Welcome ... particularly to the eighth graders", says the radio presenter, as Kathia listens attentively. She is studying at eighth grade level, and lives in a modest house made of sun-dried bricks and sheet metal, in a village located 25 minutes from the Honduran capital city.

Pencil and paper in hand, the student follows the radio class, while at the same time keeping an eye on her young daughters, Ana and Ericka Varela, three years and one year old respectively, who laugh and show their cheeks covered in spaghetti; food that their mom brings home to the table by working hard at her job.

"It's hard work because I work as a housemaid and

NUMBERS

300

Number of students enrolled to the programme in 1989

50,000

Current number of students enrolled to the programme



Left: Iris Gamero (L) and Sister Marta Soto, the founder and current dean of the programme, in the Institute's radio booth.

have to take care of and clean a house Monday through Friday," the young woman says. This is a common case among IHER students, because the student body is mainly working class, with an age range from 1460 years and it is mostly composed of women, 70 per cent of cases.

"We are very happy to share the knowledge that you will acquire by studying the textbook that you received upon enrollment", announces the second presenter in a high pitched voice, one minute into the programme.

The textbook is the first pillar of the system, this is the reason the Institute of Education by Radio set up a chain to produce and sell the texts to its students, Sister Marta explains. The educational programme is divided into weekly modules. Instead of the subjects being taught simultaneously throughout the year, they are taught in turns over a two-month period or semester.

"You probably already have

everything you need on hand, so you won't need to go and look for it during the programme," says the presenter at one minute and 20 seconds into the transmission.

The dean reminds us that the second pillar of the programme is reinforcement through the radio show, an hour per day, which is broadcast over different radio stations nationwide and with a special schedule for each course and subject.

At one minute and 30 seconds a presenter says: "This is Iris Gamero and Jose Flores, and we will be with you today." They are two of IHER's 46 employees, while its impressive coverage in Honduras' 18 departments is ensured by more than two thousand volunteers who serve as tutors.

This is where tutorials; the third pillar, come in; they are taught once a week, with a high level of attendance on Saturdays and Sundays, since this is often the only opportunity that students from the countryside have to attend class in person.

This is the case for Kathia and for 75 per cent of IHER students.

The IHER provides elementary, middle and high school education, for a small monthly payment of 100 lempiras. Seven thousand diplomas are given to graduates each year. This solidarity project has germinated in fertile soil: enrollment grew from 300 to more than 50,000 students, from 1989 to date. It is for this reason that Sister Marta states that they have contributed to lowering illiteracy rates.

Although there has not been an official study to confirm this perception, according to government statistics, the percentage of people who cannot read or write dropped from 25.4 per cent to 14.5 per cent between 1990 and 2013: a period which corresponds closely with the time the programme has been operational.

"It's a unique opportunity, and even if working and attending classes once a week is complicated, it's a good option," Kathia says, and she is determined to finish her studies. "We hope you will join us next time," the presenter says. 59:30 minutes have been aired. The lesson is over. End of transmission.

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Fight to secure future of Taiwan's children

Goal. Teach for Taiwan was founded upon education equality ideals to provide quality education to all, and to make education equality possible to children in rural areas.

BY JAMES LO

TAIPEI, TAIWAN. In 1989, Wendy Kopp, then an undergraduate student in the Princeton University, founded Teach for America (TFA), a non-profit organisation with the goal of eliminating educational inequality in the United States.

The non-profit organisation has since been recruiting university graduates and education professionals to commit themselves into serving as teachers in urban and rural communities in the US for two years of their time.

After years of hard work, the current TFA corps has become a strong organisation which recruits more than 4,000 college graduates annually to the cause so that they may impact the lives of young people.

Inspired by the ideals of Kopp, Anting Liu from Taiwan began to engineer the blueprint for Teach for Taiwan (TFT) in June of 2012, in response to the growing problem of rural areas in Taiwan, lacking the necessary human resources to provide proper education for children.

In recent years, part time staff and faculties have slowly replaced full-time teachers to become the norm of the greater education environment in the country. The turnover rate of human resource has also correspondingly risen, which resulted in unstable teaching qualities that project negatively toward the education development of students.

The problem is even more severe in rural areas, where children are often taught by underqualified teachers or by new faces constantly.

Hence, TFT was founded upon education equality ideals to provide quality education to all, and to make education equality possible to children in rural areas.

Though TFT believes that education equality is a right given to all, the foundation nevertheless acknowledges that education has never been equal in Taiwan.

According to TFT, even with the advent of the recent 12-Year Compulsory Education which promises fair education and enrollment to students in the entire nation, as well as the increase in university acceptances, education opportunities and academic achievements of children remain obviously different due to family background and location opportunities.

Even though a report from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2012 dis-



A teacher from the TFT programme in Taiwan and an education alternative service staff member lead children from a rural community in an activity in this undated photo. The TFT model to create a meaningful impact starts with the recruitment and training of passionate youth from all academic disciplines. THE CHINA POST PHOTOS

played that the average mathematics education achievement in Taiwan was ranked fourth in the world, the difference in ratio of low achieving students to high achieving students on the subject was and still remains higher than most countries.

The phenomenon led PISA to conclude that in the case of Taiwan, the social status of a student's family has a direct correlation to his or her academic achievements in school, serving as the perfect example of education inequality in Taiwan.

Local researches in the changing social dynamics of the country has also further displayed the problems of educational inequality in Taiwan, such as the high college enrollment population difference between urban and rural areas of Taiwan, regardless of the constant increase in local college admissions.

Teach for Taiwan makes impact

In hopes of improving such issues of education inequality in Taiwan, the TFT eventually came to be. Currently, TFT holds channeling the full potential of any children as its calling, believing also that education equality is the key to the future of the Taiwanese society.

The foundation now recruits passionate youths to undergo orientation and training with TFT to become qualified educators.

Following the programme, such individuals would be deployed to rural schools for two years as part of TFT's fulltime teaching programme, so that students may have a consistent adult who serves as their teacher and role model.

Without a lot of resources at hand, TFT was off to a rocky start in the early days of its establishment. However, in January 2013, a development camp that was organised by



Underprivileged students who benefitted from the TFT programme. In rural Taiwan, schools in underprivileged communities tend to lack proper educational resources and teachers, in comparison with urban schools.

the Chengji Education Foundation and the Alliance Cultural Foundation which seeks to enhance education, presented an opportunity that enabled all 14 of the nation's major tutoring organisations to consolidate their resources.

Thanks to the opportunity, TFT was able to form its first core members, who first used six months to fully understand the education difficulties faced by rural areas of the nation, as well as getting a strong grasp on the implementation possibility which

TFT may bring.

The research conducted by the members eventually proved fruitful enough for the TFT to become an official foundation that is recognised by the Taiwanese government in November 2013.

The TFT model to create a meaningful impact starts with the recruitment and training of passionate youths. The individuals will become teachers who are willing to bring about change and dedicate two years of his or her life to children who live

TFT OPERATIONS

The Teach for Taiwan recruits passionate youths to undergo orientation and training with TFT to become qualified educators. Following the programme, such individuals would be deployed to rural schools for two years as part of TFT's fulltime teaching programme, so that students may have a consistent adult who serves as their teacher and role model.

in rural areas across the nation.

Aside from serving only as teachers, TFT corps members will also receive training to provide students with support that is more than just in academics.

TFT's long term goal is to cultivate leaders from rural places who will have the same opportunity as city counterparts. Not only will such individuals contribute to the nation positively, their success would be one of the most important catalysts in achieving education equality.

Following years of hard work, TFT was able to recruit more core volunteers as well as online partners in 2013.

Though the help of such additional members, who had avidly visited schools, educators and businesses across the country to seek aid and cooperation to further strengthen the structure and protocols of the TFT, the organisation was able to receive proper funding from businesses, foundations and personal donations for the first TFT teachers recruitment in 2014.

TFT's founding staff also conducted symposiums around the country prior to the first recruitment to gather opinions and experiences from education experts.

With the foundation of TFT properly laid out, the first TFT teachers' recruitment garnered around 200 applicants, from which nine fulltime teachers and seven reserve teachers were selected.

After five weeks of intensive orientation and training, the 16 educators were deployed to schools in Taitung and Tainan, to embark on a journey of great impact for two years.

The first wave of TFT teachers was only the first step toward a goal which will eventually prove it to become a powerhouse in education, much like its American founding counterpart.

Currently, TFT is readying itself for the second wave of teachers' recruitment, with more opportunities to come in the future, so that education equality could be fully implemented in Taiwan, both for the sake of the next generation, and the greater good of the entire island nation as a whole.